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Article

A Galician Werewolf in New York: Migration and Transgressive Femininity in Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A muller loba'

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Palabras clave

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Abstract

Galicia is inseparable from the experience of migration and exile, and as has been extensively examined, mobility has played a major role in Galician culture and society. Most studies have identified the Galician diaspora with Latin America, but other locations such as London have only recently begun to receive critical attention. The aim of this article is to contribute to the development of a new understanding of this phenomenon by focusing on the literary representation of Galician migration in New York, and by taking as a case study Claudio Rodríguez Fer's short story 'A muller loba' ([1993] 2011). Rodríguez Fer's text updates the myth of the werewolf (which has a prominent presence in Galician literature) not only by taking this legend to New York, but also by subverting the submissive role played by women in this tradition. Ruth (the protagonist) represents an independent and rebellious femininity, which simultaneously challenges patriarchy, and therefore an essentialist view of the nation, and embodies the resistance of local identities in the global age. By paying special attention to the tension between the local and the global as it is reflected in this short story, and following recent and innovative studies such as those by Colmeiro (2009; 2017), Hooper (2011) and Romero (2012), this article will suggest a more extensive approach to the experience of displacement in the context of Galician migration.

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
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muller loba'*

David Miranda-Barreiro

Resumo

Como ten sido analizado extensamente, a migración e o exilio xogaron un papel crucial na cultura e sociedade galegas. Porén, a maioría dos estudos identifican a diáspora galega con Latinoamérica, mentres que outros destinos como Londres non recibiron atención académica até tempos recentes. O obxectivo deste artigo é o de contribuír a un novo entendemento deste fenómeno a través da representación literaria da migración galega a Nova York, tomando como exemplo o conto 'A muller loba' ([1993] 2011), de Claudio Rodríguez Fer. Este texto actualiza o mito do lobisome (que ten unha gran presenza na literatura galega), xa que non só leva esta lenda a Nova York, senón que tamén subverte o papel submiso xogado polas personaxes femininas nesta tradición. Ruth, a protagonista, representa unha feminidade independente e rebelde, que simultaneamente desafia o patriarcado, e polo tanto unha visión esencialista da nación, e encarna a resistencia das identidades locais na sociedade global. Este artigo prestará especial atención á tensión entre o local e o global no relato, e seguindo recentes e anovadores estudos como os de Colmeiro (2009; 2017), Hooper (2011) e Romero (2012), suxerirá un enfoque máis amplo para entender a experiencia do desprazamento no contexto da migración galega.

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro



Introduction

Traditionally, academic studies on Galician exile and migration have mostly focused on the key role played by the diaspora in Latin America from the late nineteenth century, which fostered the image of Galicia as a nation of migrants. However, recent studies of this phenomenon have started to pay critical attention to the presence of Galician migrants in other locations, and to the literary representation inspired by this experience. One of these loci of migration is London, as Kirsty Hooper has shown in *Writing Galicia into the World. New Cartographies, New Poetics* (2011), where she argues for superseding the identification between Galician migration and Latin America for a more comprehensive understanding of ‘Galicianness’ as an identity that goes beyond geographical borders and challenges essentialist notions of the nation (2011: 1-2). The end of the dictatorship and the new context of globalisation have in fact given way to new approaches for the understanding of Galicia from a post-national position. José Colmeiro, for example, has argued for a ‘remapping of contemporary Galician culture’ following ‘new perspectives and conceptual models to produce an alternative cartography that is more inclusive and better reflects new social realities’ (2009: 14). Comparable claims for a cartographical redefinition of Galicia and Galician identity have been made by Hooper, who proposes ‘rhizomatic or relational readings of Galician texts or positions [...]’ (2011: 27), and the establishment of a ‘geopoetics of Galician cultural history’ (2011: 13), inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, in which these theorists understand the map as ‘open and connectable in all of its dimensions [...] detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification’ (2011: 25). Similarly, Eugenia Romero has also pointed out the significance of the ‘exterior Galicia’ —here still embodied by the Latin American diaspora— for a decentralised understanding of the nation, in which ‘the self-perception as a nation of emigrants turns the sociological phenomenon into a cultural practice’ and where therefore ‘Galicia is no longer in its geographical place at the End of the World, connected to Spain, and bordering Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean. Galicia becomes an abstract space where both Galicians in emigration (diaspora) and those at home experience loss through *saudade* or *morriña*’ (2012: 8).

The present article intends to contribute to the development of a new understanding of Galician migration, as suggested in this growing body of works, by looking at the understudied case of the literary representation of Galician migration in New York. When comparing migratory movements in Galicia to other European countries, Ramón Villares points out that ‘aínda que con moita menor intensidade, tamén é apreciable a presenza de españois en Norte-América’ (1997: 227). More recent studies have in fact paid closer attention to the migratory movement from Galicia to this city (Pérez Rey 2001 & 2008; Mejía Ruiz 2004; Alonso 2006; Varela-Lago 2008; García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey 2007; Vilar Álvarez 2009). More general works on the Spanish migration to the US such as Rueda (1993) have shown that in the first decades of the twentieth century Galicians were a majority within the Spanish community both in New York and in the whole of the country. A few of the Galicians living in the United States were also exiles who fled their country because of the Spanish

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

1

Paradelo's novel is only set in
New York in its first chapter.

Civil War, and worked as university lecturers. This group includes, for example, Emilio González López, Ramón Martínez López, Ernesto Guerra da Cal, Eugenio Granell and José Rubia Barcia (Fuentes 2004: 38). The best-known case is that of Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao, who was based in New York from mid-1938 to 1940 (although in this period he also visited other American cities and travelled to Cuba). Invited by the *Fronte Popular Antifascista Galega*, Castelao gave a series of speeches across the USA in order to gain support for the Republican government (Mejía Ruiz 2004: 82).

According to Víctor Fuentes, the literary work of the Galician exiles in New York shares a significant characteristic with the texts written in other destinations of the Galician diaspora: they remain focused on what is happening in Galicia rather than on their adopted country (2004: 46). Exiles were more concerned with the situation that their country was enduring during the Spanish Civil War and subsequent dictatorship, and in their literary works they paid little attention to the thousands of Galician migrants living in New York. Examples of this tendency are the second volume of Castelao's seminal text *Sempre en Galiza* ([1944] 2004) —which the author started in New York but only contains succinct references to this city and the Galician migrants who lived there— and Ernesto Guerra da Cal's poetic production, as New York Galicians are even absent from his poems set in the city: 'Negro Espiritual' and 'Nocturno de Nova Iorque' from *Lúa de alén-mar* (1959), and 'Broadway Very Late' from *Río de sonbo e tempo* (1963). The most relevant literary references to Galician migrants in New York during this period can be found in two poems included by the artist and writer Luís Seoane in his book *Fardel de eisilado* ([1952] 2002): 'O ponte de Brooklyn' and 'Building Castles in Spain'. Both poems highlight the difficulties suffered by migrant workers, in stark contrast with the view of the United States as the 'land of opportunity'. The centrality of Galicia in the published work of the exiles is explained by their assumption of the responsibility of re-constructing a national identity that was being repressed in their home country, especially in the case of Castelao. As Xoan González-Millán argued, literary discourse had a key role in this political project taken on by the exiles (2004: 23).

It is therefore not surprising that literary references to Galician migration in New York have become more prominent since the end of the dictatorship; for example, in Camilo Gonsar's novel *Cara a Times Square* ([1980] 1989), and more recently in the collection of short stories *Ratas en Manhattan* (2007) by Francisco Álvarez. New York has also been the location of the novels *Xelamonite* (2006) by Luís Paradelo and *O home inédito* by Carlos G. Meixide (2007), and Inma López Silva's fictionalised diary *New York, New York* (2007), which revolve around temporary stays in the city.¹ Whereas Paradelo, Meixide and López Silva's texts have a greater focus on personal stories, Gonsar's novel and some of Álvarez Koki's short stories show a wider concern with the position of Galician identity in the new global context. In both texts, the effects of globalisation and capitalism on national identity are shown in a twofold way. On the one hand, *Ratas en Manhattan* presents us capitalism as having a dehumanising effect on the migrants (to the extent that some of these 'rats' are precisely of Galician origin); in *Cara a Times Square*, the idea of a homogenising culture is also strongly criticised as a damaging influence on local (and especially on minority) identities. On the other hand, the contact between cultures also challenges essentialist notions of national identity, and enables the existence of transnational identities. A similar tension between the global and the local can be found

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*

David Miranda-Barreiro

2

In this article I will be referring to the edition of 'A muller loba' included in *Contos e descontos* (Narrativa Completa) (2011).

3

I would like to express my gratitude to Claudio Rodríguez Fer, who kindly sent me copies of some of his texts.

4

New York has also been the theme of a series of photographs by Rodríguez Fer, entitled 'Love & Liberty' (2013) and published in the journal *Unión Libre. Cadernos de vida e culturas*, which he co-edits.

in the literary representation of Galician migration in New York carried out in Claudio Rodríguez Fer's short story 'A muller loba' (originally published in 1993) as I will demonstrate presently.²

I will analyse Rodríguez Fer's short story from three complementary angles. Firstly, I will argue that the text shows the intention of becoming part of the existing Galician literary tradition of tales of wolves and werewolves, but providing a modern version of the myth of the lycanthrope. Such emphasis on tradition strengthens a sense of local identity, nevertheless seen not as fixed but open to change. Secondly, I will examine the text from a feminist perspective that will connect the short story to the influence of feminism in Rodríguez Fer's poetic and narrative work. Once more, references to feminism are here also related to a view of national identity that goes beyond essentialism. Finally, I will argue that the short story reflects the tension between the local and the global epitomised by New York as the global centre of capitalism, by looking both at the hardship suffered by Galician migrants in this city and the possibilities offered by globalisation to minority cultures, as suggested in the text.³

Contos de Lobisomes e Mulleres Lobas: Updating the Myth of the Galician Werewolf

The Galician writer and scholar Claudio Rodríguez Fer (Lugo, 1956) has a long-standing relationship with New York. He worked as visiting professor at City University of New York in 1992, and has since then returned on several occasions to participate in poetry readings. This relationship has been reflected in his literary work, as the poet himself explained in 'Recital Poeta galego en Nueva York' (2009), in 'Mannahatta' included in *A unha muller descoñecida* (1997), some of the poems of *Extrema Europa* (1996), and in *Rosalía's Revolution in New York (Revolución rosaliana en Nova York)* presented at the 150th anniversary of the publication of Rosalía de Castro's *Cantares gallegos* (1863), which was organised by the Colectivo Celso Emilio Ferreiro in New York in 2013. This city has also appeared in his narrative work, in the short stories 'A fera fráxil' and 'A muller loba', which are gathered in the section entitled 'Belas e Bestas' from the volume *Os paraísos eróticos* (2010).⁴

'A muller loba' tells the story of Ruth, a Galician girl who descends from a she-werewolf. It was said that Ruth's father, a quarry worker who teaches Ruth to speak in the so-called 'verbo dos arginas' —the secret language of his profession— was born out of her grandmother's sexual relationships with wolves. When he dies in an accident, Ruth's mother marries another quarry worker, who tries to sexually abuse his stepdaughter, but Ruth defends herself by biting him in the neck. Her stepfather then puts a curse on her [known in Galician as 'a fada'] to become a werewolf. Ruth runs away and is given shelter by her grandmother, who unveils her lycanthropic nature in a cave covered by brambles. Ruth embraces her origins and decides to migrate to New York, where her uncle lives. After her arrival, she shows some symptoms of the curse, such as howling and having an excessive appetite for meat, although it is never clarified whether she eventually turns into a werewolf. Ruth also finds a job and has sexual relationships with two men. Both of them try to domesticate her ferocity and subjugate her to their authority, but Ruth rebels against their wishes and eventually chooses to live in solitude. At the same time, her uncle loses his senses after becoming unemployed,

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

and spends the rest of his life wandering the underground, saying in the Arginas' language that Ruth lives in a cave covered by brambles that connects New York to Galicia.

In its very first sentence, the short story is clearly located within a well-known tradition of tales of wolves and werewolves in Galician literature: 'todos sabemos que en Galicia houbo sempre lendas sobre lobos, lobisomes e alobados, pero tamén sobre mulleres lobas' (2011b: 199). This opening indicates the intention of contextualizing 'A muller loba' within such a tradition, and is reminiscent of Rodríguez Fer's prologue to his own edition of the compilation of short stories *Contos de lobos* (1989) by Ánxel Fole:

o papel ocupado polo lobo na cultura galega é tan relevante como indiscutible; os atributos máxicos que lle atribúe a tradición popular, a súa reiterada presenza na literatura, os casos de lycantropía e as múltiples lendas que sobre lobos e lobisomes circularon por Galicia, mostran ben ás claras que posúe unha dimensión mítica indubidable. Quizais por esta omnipresencia ten sido considerado como animal totémico do pobo galego desde a chegada dos celtas. (1989: 23-24)

Wolves and werewolves are two of the most prominent themes of Galician oral literature, as has been shown by the anthology *Lendas Galegas de Tradición Oral* (1995) gathered by Xosé Manuel González Reboledo, and by the work of the anthropologist Xosé Ramón Mariño Ferro in *Lobos, lobas e lobisomes* (1995). The wolf was introduced in written literature by authors such as Vicente Risco, in the short story 'O lobo da xente' ([1923] 2004b), and the aforementioned Ánxel Fole. However, both authors intend to preserve the orality of the myth when transposed to written texts. Risco's short story is inspired, as he declared in his Real Academia Galega induction speech in 1929, by a tale transmitted through oral literature (Risco 1971: 22). Fole, for his part, as has been pointed out by Rodríguez Fer, 'baséase nos hábitos narrativos de tradición oral popular, polo que o propio autor ten dito que para el un conto é bo cando lido parece contado'; this is reflected in the language used by this author, which he 'trata de recoller directamente –case magnetofonicamente– da boca do pobo' (1989: 18). A similar reference to orality is also present in Rodríguez Fer's text, in which the narrator explains that the story was transmitted orally: 'a min mesmo, por exemplo, contáronme a historia dunha da que, maldicida no momento de nacer por motivos de envexa, se dicía que andara de moza libre cunha grea de lobos polo monte e que, nas noites de lúa chea, se volvía loba e se apareaba con eles' (199). As Natalia Regueiro points out, Rodríguez Fer has studied Fole's work extensively, and therefore 'todos estes anos de [...] afervorado estudio deixaron pegadas na produción creativa de Fer, particularmente na súa lírica, como mostra o poema "O lobo oubea", de *Tigres de ternura*' (1998: 30). A similar influence can also be found in 'A muller loba', which emphasises not only Rodríguez Fer's comprehensive knowledge of the theme of the wolf and the werewolf in Galician literature, but also the aim of placing this short story within such a tradition. Moreover, the narrator refers here to one of the variations of the werewolf myth in Galician oral literature: the *peeiro/a*, *piero/a* or *capitán/a dos lobos*, also mentioned by Vicente Risco in his speech: 'imos agora espôr o do *piero dos lobos*. Chaman asina no concello d'Avión â persoa (home ou muller) que ten poder sobor dos lobos. Empéchalles qu'acometan ô gando, por unha banda, e por outra, tamén garda ôs lobos cand'os queren cazar.'

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

5

Manuel Blanco Romasanta (1809-1863) was a Galician serial killer who was diagnosed with clinical lycanthropy, a psychiatric condition that induced him to believe that he could turn into a werewolf. His story has been made into a novel by Alfredo Conde, *Romasanta, memorias incertas do home lobo* (2004), which was later adapted into a film, *Romasanta, la caza de la bestia* (2004) by Paco Plaza. Pedro Olea's film *El bosque del lobo* (1970), which adapted Carlos Martínez Barbeito's novel *El bosque de Ancines* ([1947] 1966) is also inspired by Romasanta's case.

(Risco 1971: 24). Vicente Risco's speech, entitled 'Un caso de lycantropía (o home lobo)' is still one the most complete studies about the werewolf myth in Galicia. Although the text focuses especially on the well-known case of Manuel Blanco Romasanta, it also offers an analysis of the presence of the myth in oral literature, as well as its connection with similar cases in other cultures and literary systems.⁵ Risco includes in his speech a legend that is especially relevant for the present article, which was subsequently studied by his son Antón Risco in the volume *Comentario de textos populares e de masas* (1994), edited by Rodríguez Fer. Significantly, the title given by Antón Risco to this legend is also 'A muller loba'. The tale has several points in common with Rodríguez Fer's short story: a female protagonist, the fact that she eats great amounts of meat, and the reference to the 'captain of wolves' (who in Rodríguez Fer's text is embodied by Ruth's grandmother), as we can see in the following extract:

había alá en tempos en Castela un pai que tiña moitas fillas e unha d'elas comía moita carne, canta máis lle daban, máis comía. E un día o pai díxolle: "Índa vaias comer carne cos lobos ao monte. Foi palabra maldita [...] e unhas veces andaba de lobo e outras de muller. Foi desandando, desandando hasta que chegou ô Cebreiro e ás canellas d'Agras de Tosende (Ourense). Por estes montes andivo moito tempo facendo de capitana dos lobos, faguendo moitos estragos na facenda e na xente (esto cando estaba de lobo). (1971: 22)

As evidenced by Vicente Risco's speech, the presence of she-wolves in the corpus of Galician narratives of lycanthropy is not new. Nevertheless, in contrast with previous versions of the myth, Ruth embodies a rebellious femininity that goes against the social rules imposed by patriarchy. For example, at the end of Risco's short story 'O lobo da xente', it is revealed that the werewolf was in fact a woman, who had been cursed by her mother after she found out that her daughter had beaten her stepfather with a stick when he tried to sexually abuse her. This she-werewolf is freed from the curse by a young man called Ángel, who marries her. The end of the story restores the 'natural' social order that had been disturbed at the beginning, and the main character ends up married and having a 'legitimate' relationship. However, the reader never knows her name, only that she is first a daughter and then a wife. Significantly, Rodríguez Fer's short story begins in a similar way:

cando chegaba borracho a casa adoitaba apalpala e, moitas veces, tiña que intervir a nai para que a deixase en paz. Un día no que a rapaza estaba soa, o padraito pechou as portas da cociña e reduciuna contra un recanto, pero cando xa lle estaba esgazando a roupa polo peito, ela mordeuno con tal fereza no pescozo que tivo que soltala cun berro de dor e raiba, mentres buscaba un pano para deter o sangue que manaba abondosamente da ferida. Ruth fuxiu case sen alento, escoitando como o padraito lle berraba e a maldición:

—¡Loba te volvas!, ¡loba te volvas, fera furiosa!, ¡loba te volvas como a túa avoa! ¡loba te volvas! (199-200)

Nevertheless, and contrary to previous versions of the myth, Ruth does not turn into a wolf, but returns to her home village, 'o vello lar', 'a aldea orixinaria' (200) where her grandmother gives her shelter, and takes her to

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

a cave hidden by brambles. Inside the cave, Ruth discovers her lycanthropic origins:

a vella remexeu nas silvas e deu co burato dunha cova por onde penetrou áxil e decididamente. Ela seguiuna entre as paredes estreitas e pulidas da caverna, cubertas por completo de pelexos de lobo. Finalmente, o vteiro ensanchouse e chegaron a un relanzo onde a auga fluía sen marchar para ningures. Acumulados polas rochas do entorno, viu obxectos indicibles, sobre os que non se atreveu a preguntar, pero comprendeu as suas orixes e o seu fado. Fóra da cova, no alto das silveiras, podía escoitarse o oubeo longo e antigo, telúrico e feraz, como se viñera do mesmo centro da terra. E todo o monte ficou cuberto por unha negrura loba. (201)

The presence of the cave is a recurrent theme, not only in this text, but also in several of the short stories from 'Belas e Bestas'. In 'A raposa boreal', the cave is the final destination of Marie-Loup's lover, a 'cova incógnita, cuberta por unha engrela de vizosas matadeiras húmidas, disposta a devoralo' (2011: 215). Marie-Loup actually shares several features with Ruth: her rebelliousness and free sexuality, but also the fact that she comes from a minoritised culture (Brittany in this case) and allegedly has wolfish origins: 'había quen dicía que, en realidade, fora filla adoptiva dunha loba ou dunha raposa [...] e mesmo alguén [...] suxeriu que fora a propia nai quen se entregara aos lobos e que a nena era membro dunha camada negra diabolicamente infiltrada na badía dos señores brancos' (2011: 210). The cave is also the home of the 'Osa que chove', a mythical she-bear of lush sexuality, who hunted by men after they exterminate her sloth and enslave her litter, finds solace in the sexual company of wolves. In this case, men think that the she-bear is 'unha bruxa fuxida ao monte de nova [...] e que vivía nunha caverna cubríndose cunha pel de oso' (2011: 234). Humans also believe that 'os osos podían procrear persoas coas mulleres, pero que as osas só procreaban monstros cos homes, quizáis porque consideraban demoníaco o fulgor vaxinal que as posuía, un instinto natural que xulgaban improcedente mesmo para as bestas' and therefore 'comezou a persecución [...] da lanza contra a vulva' (2011: 234). In these stories, the cave is identified with female genitalia, whose freedom is often feared by men who try to control it with violence, and on occasion also represents the repressed origins of her possessor, as it becomes evident in 'A fera fráxil'. The main character in this text is another magical female from a minoritised culture, the Native American Rasa, who works at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. When the manager of the museum becomes obsessed with her, and 'tratou de seducila reducíndoa', Rasa is saved by a totem that comes into life and after adopting 'unha forma completamente fálica [...] abriu na femia unha cova enorme e sen fin pola que entraban lanzas e machados, ferramentas e remos, trineos e canoas, ídolos e máscaras, postes conmemorativos, toda clase, en fin, de obxectos primitivos alí depositados, e no fondo da cova estaba o sol' (2011: 226). In turn, the manager is also penetrated by such a plethora of symbols of Native American culture until he 'viuse a si mesmo vestido con amerindia indumentaria, cruzando en canoa o río do esquecemento' (2011: 230). The image of the cave therefore agglutinates a female sexuality that resists being violated with the place of origin, where myth and identity become intertwined. In the case of 'A muller loba' it is also where the roots of the bramble (which will reappear at

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

the end of the story) can be found. As I will show later on in this article, the bramble represents Ruth's strong link with Galicia, which also echoes the way the short story is rooted in Galician literary tradition; but before that, we will have to go with her to New York.

A Loba e o Cazador: For a Natural Femininity and a Lycanthropic Feminism

The attack suffered by Ruth at the hands of her stepfather leaves her weak and feverish: 'o que máis as consumían eran as lembranzas e o que máis lle doía era o maltrato padecido na súa propia casa' (201). When she recovers, Ruth is given an amulet by her grandmother, a wolf's fang that will give her 'máis forza que sete lobas'. She then decides to leave Galicia, 'tratando de fuxir das súas lembranzas e segura de si mesma' (201). Ruth will bring the Galician myth to New York, and there she will protect her newly found freedom as a lycanthropic independent woman from the attack of male hunters.

The choice of destination is explained by the fact that 'o seu tío, que traballaba limpando cristais nos rañaceos de Nova York, ofrecérase moitas veces para buscarlle traballo ao seu irmán, de modo que tamén podería buscarlo a ela' (202). According to Rueda, this was in fact a common practice in migratory movements: 'la "llamada" de familiares, amigos y vecinos. [...] Decidida ya la emigración, se acude allí donde alguien conocido puede ayudar' (1993: 40). However, and albeit limited to an individual case, Rodríguez Fer's text offers an unusual perspective on migration. As highlighted by García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey (2007: 426-427), female migration was traditionally neglected from migration studies until the publication of Mirjana Morokvasic's article 'Birds of Passage Are Also Women' (1984). Before, 'o máis habitual [...] foi a definición da muller emigrante como un elemento pasivo da emigración, de exclusivo acompañamento do home, situándoos a eles nas esferas públicas e relegando a muller ó ámbito privado' (García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey 2007: 426). Subsequent studies have analysed the scenarios that motivate women to migrate. García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey, following Dolores Julianio's work, point out that one of the reasons behind female migration is to be considered 'mulleres cun status desvalorizado na sociedade de orixe: nais solteiras, fuxitivas, matrimonios indeseados ou vítimas de agresións sexuais' (2007: 427). This is precisely Ruth's case, and the short story therefore not only gives visibility to the understudied case of female mobility, but also to violence against women. Moreover, the choice of New York as Ruth's destination also provides some insight into a lesser-known location of Galician migration, which was in fact not only restricted to men. García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey point out that 'o número de mulleres das mariñas coruñesas que emigraron a Nova York non foi marxinal: así foi o caso do concello de Bergondo que entre 1917 e 1923 as mulleres representan un 11% da súa emigración. Destas, dirixíronse a Nova York un 35%' (2007: 431). A reference to the Ford Foundation Building at the end of Rodríguez Fer's short story locates the text later than 1968 (year when this edifice was finished); as shown by García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey (2007: 431) and Vilar Álvarez (2009: 73), the migration of Galician women to this city did not stop after the 1920s.

The study by García-Rodeja & Pérez Rey suggests that in New York most Galician migrant women ended up secluded in the family home,

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

limited by their lack of knowledge of English, and in charge of bringing up their children, while their husbands often moved temporarily to work in other locations (2007: 433). However, Ruth will not comply with this pattern. In New York, she seems to embrace her nature as a she-werewolf, as she starts howling and eating huge amounts of meat as well as unleashing her sexuality. Moreover, she also enjoys economic independence thanks to a low-paid job, and when the two men with whom she has relations attempt to domesticate her free spirit, she not only rejects their marriage proposals but also seems to be somehow involved in their deaths. Both men are portrayed as hunters that Ruth has to confront. Her first lover is a Puerto Rican young man who works at an Argentine steak house. At first, Ruth enjoys his company and takes advantage of his work at the restaurant to quench her appetite for meat:

a voracidade carnívora da rapaza incrementouse desmesuradamente durante as longas esperas, nas que consumía, prato tras prato, toda clase de carnes á grella [...] gozaba con gruñidos de satisfacción e acenos de ferocidade, e [...] logo parecía ter continuación nas constantes mordeduras con que trababa o pescozo e a lingua do seu acompañante. (2011: 203)

However, in the scene in which she refuses to marry him, he is described as a danger to her independence:

cando o mozo propúxolle casar [...] sentíu unha tromba de víboras descendendo en fervenza polo peito [...] Pararon nun alto da serra onde había cervos e ao saír ela do auto botáronse a fuxir espavorecidos monte abaixo, cunha sensación de perigo semellante á de Ruth diante das propostas matrimoniais do pretendente. (203)

The symbolism of the deer as representation of male sexuality or the male lover in Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo* (see Louzada Fonseca & Melo Araújo 2013) is here subverted, as Ruth's boyfriend is precisely depicted as its opposite. Louzada Fonseca & Melo Araújo argue that 'como símbolo cristológico, o cervo é inimigo e destruidor de serpentes, obrigando-as a saír de suas covas pelo sopro de suas narinas' (2013: 427). In this case, not only the lover 'creates' vipers inside of Ruth's chest, but she is in fact identified with the deer, and therefore, with a sexuality that challenges gender binaries and refuses to be confined within heteronormativity. Her lover does not, in fact, understand why she does not want to marry him, and similarly to her stepfather, curses Ruth again: 'non comprendeu o seu desexo de preservar a independencia e que non puido evitar dicirlle con rabia contida: –Has morrer soa como unha loba' (203). Like the hunter after his prey, this man threatens Ruth 'con toda clase de violencias' (203). However, gender roles are challenged again, as the hunter becomes the hunted and finds 'unha morte estraña e nunca esclarecida, pois, sen outros sinais de violencia, o seu corpo presentaba tan só dúas incisivas punzadas no corazón' (203–204). While it is never made explicit, the text insinuates that he was killed by the she-werewolf.

Ruth's second suitor is a butcher married to a vegetarian woman, who is fascinated by Ruth's ferocity, and finds her a job in the meat industry. After some time, however, the butcher asks Ruth to leave her employment —and therefore her economic independence— so she can

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

be fully devoted to him. The end of her relationship is again depicted as a hunt: 'entendeu a proposta como unha nova trampa. Figurouse ao carniceiro como un cazador experto que só pode ser vencido coa súa propia intriga' (205). In order to scare him, Ruth eats a raw kid goat in front of the butcher. In a rather humorous ending, her lover runs away terrified and is run over by a motorcycle ridden by a pizza deliveryman.

Ruth's savagery and independence are not exclusive of this character, but a rather recurrent trait of the female protagonists of 'Belas e Bestas'. In most of these stories, women protagonists are given animal attributes and defy patriarchy and traditional gender roles. In Ruth's case, her appetite for meat and her 'incontible peluxe pública [...] estendéndose pelve arriba e coxas abaixo por fóra do traxe de baño' (205-206), also break with the femininity/masculinity dichotomy and suggest a sexuality located in a liminal space, which destabilises a clear-cut view of gender categories as, following Judith Butler:

the peculiar phenomenon of a 'natural sex' or a 'real woman' or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions [...] a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another. ([1990] 2010: 191)

In her examination of the construction of the female body within the Foucauldian theorisation of power, Ann J. Cahill points out that 'given the admittedly complex, but always central, role of the body in the political oppression of women, the feminine body is a particularly crucial text' (2000: 50). While reviewing the work of feminist scholars Iris Marion Young and Sandra Lee Bartky, Cahill also argues that 'the impetus to transform one's body into something beautiful by means of cosmetic form transforms the body into a hostile entity, constantly threatening to revert to its natural, hence unbeautiful state' (2000: 52). The female body, therefore, becomes an enemy for women themselves, and one that also turns into a 'pre-victim': 'if it attempts something beyond its highly limited capacities, if it wanders beyond its safety zone, it can expect to be hurt' (2000: 52). On the contrary, Ruth's body defies such a logic. Her hairiness can be associated with the werewolf myth, but also challenges body hair practices which 'consistently reveal the pervasiveness of sexism and heterosexism. Hairiness connotes masculine qualities. Hair has historically [...] represented power, so women's routine hair removal symbolizes their lack of power' (Fahs 2011: 454). In New York, and enhanced by her lycanthropic nature, Ruth becomes empowered, able to move freely not only across countries but also across the city, as she is not to be hurt, but rather hurts those who threaten her. If her metamorphosis into werewolf is never shown explicitly it is because this is her real transformation: Ruth turns from a victim controlled by the rules of patriarchy (represented not only by her stepfather but also by her mother, who allows the abuse to happen) to an independent woman who protects her freedom and whose body is not tamed by gender conventions. The myth of the lycanthrope is therefore a catalyst for a wild and natural femininity that defies the patriarchal logic. This is consistent with the views on gender that emanate from Rodríguez Fer's poetic and narrative work, which, as Olga Novo points out, stand for a subversive view of women as absolutely free and independent, for whom love is revolutionary, and life is a utopia (Regueiro 1998: 54). Similarly, the

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

transgressive potential of she-werewolves has also been explored in horror films; as argued by Brenda S. Gardenour Walter:

films featuring male werewolves, such as *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961), *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *Wolf* (1994) call into question the construct of rational masculinity, whereas the transgressive female werewolves of *The Howling* (1980), *Company of Wolves* (1984), and *Ginger Snaps* (2000) allow for feminist and queer discourses on gender and othering set against the hegemony of patriarchy. (2015: 11-12)

Disappointed by her erotic experiences, 'sabendo que [...] practicamente ningún home acepta a independencia dunha femia' (205), Ruth decides to live in solitude, since 'pensaba que só podería entenderse cunha especie de lobo solitario, pero tamén que sería difícil atopalo dentro daquela manda de cans domésticos' (206). Ruth also resigns from her job, because she does not want to work with anything related to meat anymore, and finds a new job taking care of the garden that belongs to the Ford Foundation, located at the centre of Manhattan. In this garden, 'entre a coidada vexetación' there is:

unha silveira, acaso procedente da súa aldea, tratando de aclimatare a tan estraño ambiente de natureza urbana. Quen a coñece di que baixo a silveira hai unha cova e que nela agacha Ruth os seus segredos, pero os pobres sen fogar da rúa 42 pensan que nela mora un animal estraño que alguén viu de noite lambendo as enormes vidrieiras acoutadoras do lugar. (206)

In the reference to standardisation suggested by the transposition of Fordism to a neat and 'domesticated' garden, reverberates the homogenising threat of globalisation, which contrasts with the wildness and resistance of the bramble and the mythical character of the cave. Once more, this is not something new in Rodríguez Fer's work, in which the defence of nature is a constant theme. Furthermore, nature is often identified with Galicia, represented as 'paisaxe e comunidade en loita dende os seus primeiros libros' (Regueiro 1998: 22), and associated 'cunha feminidade natural e independente' which 'nada ten que ver coa concepción tradicional da muller identificada coa nai, tan común na nosa tradición literaria e nacionalista' (Novo, quoted in Regueiro 1998: 22). In the following section, I will examine the tension between a local (but not essentialist) Galician identity destabilised by Ruth's incarnation of the myth of the werewolf, and globalisation.

Unha cova que conecta Galicia con Nova York: A Trans(g)local Galicia?

Nature, the myth of the werewolf, and even Ruth's rebelliousness against the submission enforced by patriarchy, can be interpreted in 'A muller loba' as a symbolic representation of Galicia and the resistance against a globalising homogenisation, but without falling into an essentialist view of identity. Globalisation and capitalism are criticised as dehumanising forces suffered in particular by the migrants. Rodríguez Fer's text in fact echoes the hardship often endured by Galicians in America since the beginning of the twentieth century, where 'os traballos masculinos [...] foron demasiado marxinais para permitir un asentamento permanente. [...] os homes

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

galegos quedaron limitados a empregos marxinais —o mar, as minas, a hostalaría...— no mundo de fala inglesa' (Alonso 2006: 51-52). Ruth's first job in New York, cleaning the windows of skyscrapers in Manhattan, is also reminiscent of the activities of some Galicians in the city; following Miguel-Anxo Murado, 'un nutrido grupo de jóvenes de la villa de Muros se especializó en la limpieza de ventanas de rascacielos' (2008: 130). Such difficulties are also reflected in her living conditions, as 'o seu tío só puido conseguir que durmisse na cocíña, chea de telarañas, dun pequeno piso alugado que compartía con outros emigrantes' (202). It is precisely Ruth's uncle who most clearly embodies the adversities faced by migrants. After losing his job, he becomes homeless and goes insane. His unfortunate destiny and his madness do not only function as denunciation of the effects of capitalism on working class migrants, but also suggest a tension between the local and the global:

preto de alí, en medio da inmensa Estación Central, pide esmola un mendigo tolo rosmando inintelixiblemente no verbo dos arginas que baixo a silveira plantada no xardín dun rañaceos de Nova York hai unha cova tan profunda que atravesa o Océano Atlántico e ten saída baixo doutra silveira no alto dunha montaña de Galicia. Ruth cruza a antesala diariamente e parece querer transmitirlle co fulgor cómplice da súa profunda ollada que, en realidade, as dúas silveiras son a mesma. (206)

The reference to the Arginas' language as lost and incomprehensible insinuates a possible —and fatal— destiny for the Galician language in global society. At the same time, the indecipherable message uttered by Ruth's uncle also alludes to the connection between the so-called Galicia *exterior* and Galicia *interior*, the mainland and the migrant community. The subterranean length and the resilience of the bramble not only echo Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, but also the comment made by an unknown Andalusian artist to Castelao, according to whom Galicians have 'elastic roots': 'de tanta elasticidade que vos deixan dare mil voltas ó redor do mundo e alentando en chan alleo estades sempre vivindo nos vosos eidos' (Rodríguez Castelao 2000: 135). Similarly, the she-werewolf has the power to transform geographical borders and challenge Euclidian space: she is neither in Galicia nor in New York, but in both at the same time. As Eugenia Romero (2012: 105) suggests, 'it is impossible to localize only one Galicia [...]; the concrete space of a Galician territory is substituted by an imagined space, which offers at the same time a new territory (another Galicia) from which and in which Galician identity is created'. This aspect of the short story is reminiscent of a key characteristic of the werewolf in the Galician literary tradition, identified by Danny Barreto: the continuous movement of the werewolf across borders, which not only questions essentialist views of Galician identity, but also the relationship between Galicia and Spain. Barreto argues that:

even though the Galician werewolf is steeped in its locality and continually reminds us that we are in Spain, we can also argue that it simultaneously helps establish an idea of Galicia as a foreign territory within Spain, at once under Spanish jurisdiction but culturally distinct. The border is a necessary space and constant element in each re-telling of the Galician werewolf story. The repeated

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

references to the border remind us that Galicia's connection with the rest of Spain is not seamless. The wolf-man continually slips back and forth across borders. (2012: 68)

As Barreto points out referring to Romasanta, the werewolf's body disrupts established and stable notions of national, gender and sexual purity, as it 'questions binaries, boundaries and identities'; however, 'rarely does it offer satisfactory resolutions, questioning the difference between the "other" and the "self"' (Barreto 2012: 68). By contrast, in the case of Rodríguez Fer's she-werewolf, the tension between the local identity represented by Ruth and the threat of a global identity is resolved in a glocal or hybrid image. Galicia is not only connected to New York, but the city also incorporates an element of Galician nature in the form of the bramble, echoing García Canclini's definition of hybridisation as 'sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices' (2005: xxv). For the narrative combination of elements from two separate spaces into one single image, I also suggest the concept 'translocation', which has been recently used in postcolonial studies as 'an interruptive act that challenges and re-codifies the way in which the nation is conceptualized, while simultaneously affirming the fluidity of culture and the precariousness of belonging' (Prentice, Devadas & Johnson 2010b: xx). If at the beginning of the text the narrator argued that stories about wolves and werewolves were part of Galicia's folklore, the last sentence of the short story shows a shift of perspective: 'tras eles, queda sempre a vaga e misteriosa resonancia dese oubeo que todo transeúnte nocturno escoitou algunha vez por Nova York' (14). The Galician legend of the lycanthrope becomes part of New York's mythology and is updated through a new feminist reading of Galician oral tradition, which dismantles essentialist and patriarchal views of national identity, without renouncing its origins and surrendering to homogenisation. The legend of the she-werewolf goes beyond Galician borders —following José Colmeiro, 'the locations of culture in the global age surpass the traditional geopolitical limits of modern nations' (2017: 25)— and settles down at the heart of Manhattan. Colmeiro precisely refers to the process of hybridisation that 'binds the old with the new, the local with the global' as a characteristic of Galician identity in the global context due to its diasporic nature, which for this academic is 'integral to modern Galician cultural identity' (2017: 25). Going even further, Colmeiro suggests that the 'dynamic condition' of Galician identity 'could potentially be a major advantage in our global age' (2017: 25). Significantly, in Rodríguez Fer's short story, whereas Ruth's uncle gets lost in a culture that he never manages to understand and to which he does not adapt, the she-werewolf embodies Colmeiro's words, and not only becomes part of New York —as the bramble does— but also retains her independence and identity. This image summarises the role of the lycanthrope in the text. By mirroring the transformative powers as well as the liminality and transgressive condition of the she-werewolf, the short story insinuates the possibility of a 'translocal Galicia' which goes beyond patriarchal essentialism and geographical borders without becoming engulfed by globalisation, but rather appropriating it and embracing its glocal potential.

*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*

David Miranda-Barreiro

Conclusion

In Claudio Rodríguez Fer's short story 'A muller loba', nature, myth and language represent a culture at risk of disappearing in the global age. The response to such a threat is not, however, that of simple resistance or rejection, but the combination of rebellion and adaptation, therefore suggesting the possibility of change without renouncing one's identity. This response is epitomised by the roots of the bramble, symbol of the strong connection between the Galician migrant and her own land, which finds shelter at the heart of the global city par excellence and, at the same time, signifies a telluric and spiritual connection with the homeland through the power of the myth. Consistent with Rodríguez Fer's narrative and poetic work, the wildness of both the bramble (nature) and the she-werewolf (femininity) can be identified with Galicia as an untameable community. The resisting presence of the myth of the lycanthrope in the Galician cultural imaginary reflects the strength of the local identity, and its re-invention through the subversion of traditional views on gender and its change of location defies essentialist views of the nation. New York City provides the protagonist with space for independence and allows her to gain control of her own body and sexuality, in contrast with her mother's submission to patriarchy in the homeland. The text suggests, therefore, the need for an organic rebellion, in which the national identity is shaken and reconstructed from a feminist perspective. Thanks to the physical distance between New York and Galicia, Ruth is also able to accept herself and fully embrace her origins, to the extent of seeding her identity in this new spatial location, which is transformed, turned into a place that is both familiar and unfamiliar. Galicia transcends its geographical and national borders, and through the roots of the bramble, reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic multiplicity, is connected to New York thanks to the experience of the migrant. Binary oppositions such as absence/presence and male/female are superseded by a complex view of identity, reflected in the challenge to the essential duality of the werewolf. Instead of being either woman or wolf, human or animal, Ruth manages to exist, simultaneously, as both. In this process, and as a she-werewolf, Ruth becomes a glocal myth, only utterable through a secret and dying language, which resists disappearing in the memory of a lost and insane migrant. The tension between the local and the global, successfully resolved in Ruth's liminal position between two worlds, is still strongly present in her uncle's destiny. Madness, poverty and marginalisation are shown as cruel consequences of capitalism on the migrant. Although in Ruth's case displacement is presented as a liberating experience, the short story does not shy away from highlighting the loss and nostalgia experienced by the migrant, here expressed in her uncle's delirious belief in the existence of a cave that connects Galicia to New York. The ambiguity of the re-interpreted and now glocal myth (whose veracity is never confirmed) therefore allows for simultaneous and complementary readings, which capture the complex experience of migration, key to understanding contemporary Galician identity.



*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*
David Miranda-Barreiro

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*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*

David Miranda-Barreiro

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*A Galician Werewolf in
New York: Migration and
Transgressive Femininity in
Claudio Rodríguez Fer's 'A
muller loba'*

David Miranda-Barreiro

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